

Dispelling Cultural Myths Surrounding Oral Health

Nebraska Minority Health
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Advancing Health
Through the Generations


CDC NHANES 1999 - 2002

Good News for children ages 6-19!

- ◆ 15% decrease prevalence in tooth decay
- ◆ 10% decrease in untreated decay

CDC NHANES 1999-2002

Good News for adults age 20 and up!

- ◆ 4 % decrease in prevalence of decay
 - ◆ 18% decrease in untreated decay
 - ◆ 20% decrease in complete tooth loss
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CDC NHANES 1999 - 2002

Bad News for children ages 6-19.

- ◆ Mexican Americans had the highest amount of decay 55%, and African American (43%) compared to White-American (38%)
- ◆ Twice as many children from low income families had decay (55%) compared to high income children.

CDC NHANES 1999 - 2002

Bad News for adults 20 and above.

- ◆ While more white Americans had higher levels of decay (93%) than Hispanic (84%) and black Americans (85%), white Americans had less untreated decay (18%) compared to Hispanic (36%) and black Americans (41%)


Current Trends

- ◆ While improvements are seen across the nation, racial minorities and the poor continue to suffer from disparities in access and knowledge for good oral health.

Public Health Recommendations

- ◆ Programs designed to promote oral health should include interventions designed to reduce disparities in racial/ethnic minorities, people of lower income and lower educational levels.


What Contributes to Poor Oral Health?

- ◆ Lack of access to care
 - ◆ Lack of appropriate knowledge
 - ◆ Low motivation
 - In proper home care
 - To seek appropriate preventive services
 - ◆ Cultural habits and practices
 - ◆ Poor dietary habits and genetics
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Cultural Practices and Beliefs

- ◆ Passed down through generations
- ◆ Some beliefs have spiritual significance
- ◆ Difficult to change once established
- ◆ The lower the education level the greater the tendency to practice cultural standards of health care
 - Young O. Rhee Kim DrPH, RN
 - Lourdes Vazquez, James Swan

Common African American View on Illness

- ◆ Illness result of improper diet, exposure to cold/winds or habits
 - ◆ Religion, spirituality and kinship impact how illness is dealt with
 - ◆ Folk remedies and prayer common
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Some Common African American Beliefs Regarding Oral Health

- ◆ Unborn babies eat their mother's teeth during pregnancy
 - ◆ Swollen, bleeding gums are normal while pregnant
 - ◆ Teeth are temporary and fall out as you get older
 - ◆ Dentures are normal and expected beyond age thirty
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Common Hispanic/Latino American Views on Illness

“Sickness is the will of God”


Illness is an imbalance, the soul is separating from the body.

Many believe God determines outcome. Herbal and alternative medicine.

Strong belief in fatalism

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Common Hispanic/Latino Views on Oral Health

- ◆ Baby teeth are not important
 - ◆ May seek care only when pain becomes intolerable
 - ◆ Long use of baby bottles and sweets to pacify children
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Laotian/Thailand

- ◆ Dreams of teeth falling out means parent is passing away
- ◆ Dream of lower teeth falling out means wife is passing away

Acculturation

- ◆ Acculturation (adaptation to a new culture and language) is a predictor in improving oral health status
- ◆ Improves access to care seeking behavior
 - Francisco Ramos-Gomez DDS, MS, MPH and others, JADA Vol. 36 Sept. 2005

Dispelling Cultural Myths and Habits

Myth #1: unborn babies eat their mother's teeth.

- ◆ False: teeth are permanent once fully formed. Tooth decay rate increases during pregnancy due to faster bacteria growth
- ◆ Gums may swell due to trapped plaque and food under the gums leading to faster bacteria growth during pregnancy

Dispelling Cultural Myths

Myth #2: teeth are temporary and fall out as you grow older.

- ◆ False: adult teeth are permanent and fall out only due to severe decay, gum disease, or trauma (knocked out)
- ◆ Baby teeth should last until they naturally come out due to proper age for good jaw and adult teeth development

Dispelling Cultural Myths

Myth#3: dentures are normal and expected beyond age 30.

- ◆ Dentures replace only 20% of natural chewing capacity even if well fitting
- ◆ Adult teeth should last a lifetime if proper care is given at home and professionally

Dispelling Cultural Myths

Myth#4: dental care should only be obtained when teeth hurt.

- ◆ Seeking dental treatment only when it hurts is like seeking care for cancer and heart disease when pain is felt; it may be too late!
- ◆ Prevention and knowledge of proper home care can prevent tooth pain
- ◆ Early dental care can prevent pain and loss.

Dispelling Cultural Myths

Myth #5: keeping young children on bottles filled with sweet drinks including milk after teeth develop is good.


- ◆ Children need to be weaned from the bottle no later than age one.
- ◆ Sweet drinks and milk can promote tooth decay on the front teeth where the nipple contacts the teeth.
- ◆ Never allow children to sleep with bottles or pacifiers coated with sweets. If necessary, use water only.

Dispelling Cultural Myths

Myth #6: Home remedies for tooth pain like hydrogen peroxide is good to use.

- ◆ Most home remedies like hydrogen peroxide are cancer-causing substances and may lead to worse problems if used in the mouth.

The “Catch-22” of Oral Health Care Knowledge

- ◆ Most information regarding proper oral health care is obtained in the office of a dentist or dental hygienist.
 - ◆ Lack of access to dental care contributes to lack of knowledge and poor oral health practices.
 - ◆ Lack of knowledge on proper oral health care reduces the likeliness of seeking oral health care services
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Importance of Oral Health Care Knowledge

- ◆ Problem: for racial/ethnic minorities and low income populations, the lack of access to care reduces the chances of good oral health practice knowledge being obtained.


Importance of Oral Health care Knowledge

- ◆ Solution: oral health care information must be made available outside of the dental office, i.e. WIC, social service agencies, public advertisement, public education and in school curriculums.

Why is Oral Health Education Important?

- ◆ Gum disease associated with low birth-weights babies
 - ◆ Poor oral hygiene and gum infections worsens diabetes management
 - ◆ Gum disease linked to heart disease
 - ◆ Tooth infections can lead to brain abscesses and inflammation of the throat and chest
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Why is Oral Health Knowledge Important?

- ◆ Poor oral health can result in transplanted organ rejections
 - ◆ Bleeding gums lowers body resistance to infections and can be an opening for germs to enter the body
 - ◆ Poor teeth limit food chewing and lowers selections of fruits and vegetables
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Why is Oral Health Care Important?

- ◆ Poor oral health impacts the health of the body
- ◆ “You are not healthy without good oral health.”

-Dr. Everett Koop
US Surgeon General 1981- 1989

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